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AUTHOR Chapin, June R.
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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the controversy generated by the 1994 release of the "National Standards for United States History: Exploring the American Experience (5-12)" and "National Standards for World History: Exploring Paths to the Present (5-12)." The standards engendered protests as conservatives and others charged that it was a "politically correct" document with multiple perspectives, extravagant multiculturalism, and an anti-West bias. Media analysis showed that the more liberal newspapers and magazines supported the new standards with few qualifications and more conservative magazines and journals generally were very negative about the new history standards. The debate became a political focus where the supporters and critics reflected fundamental philosophical differences about U.S. history and world history. The media neglected the questions of whether or not the United States needed standards or if the writing of history is indeed revision. The history standards controversy probably will have an impact on other projects in other fields designing standards, as well as influence the acceptance of other social studies standards. Contains 36 references. (EH)

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THE CONTROVERSY ON NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR HISTORY

June R. Chapin
College of Notre Dame

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting
of the National Council for the Social Studies
Chicago, Illinois
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Title: The Controversy on National Standards for History

Abstract

The History standards released in 1994 by the National Center for History in the Schools engendered protests as conservatives and others charged that it was a "politically correct" document with multiple perspectives, extravagant multiculturalism and an anti-West bias. An analysis of media showed that the more liberal newspapers and magazines supported the new History standards with few qualifications. The more conservative magazines and journals were generally very negative about the new History standards. The History standards debate had a political focus where the line up of supporters and critics reflected fundamental philosophical differences about our nation's history and world history. There was a neglect in the media of whether or not we needed standards or the idea that history is revision. The History standards' controversy will probably have an impact on other projects in other fields designing standards as well as acceptance of other social studies standards.

The Controversy on National Standards for History

Background to the Problem

Most of the national standards for the field of social studies released in 1994 did not receive much attention from the media with the exception of the history standards. It is of little surprise that the history standards engendered controversy, especially in light of the debates within the past few years from New York to California that the kind of history, people's story of the past, is a controversial issue for the schools (Cornbleth & Waugh, 1995). Parents, religious leaders, members of political organizations and of ethnic groups speak at school board and state curriculum meetings regarding their concerns about their group portrayal or their lack of coverage in the textbooks and other materials that are being considered for adoption or are already in the classrooms. In addition the increased national attention to the "unfairness" of affirmative action laws also represents concern about what is perceived as over-compensation to multicultural interests. Whose history is to be presented? How much attention should the various groups receive? If more attention is given to various individuals and groups, will all students be exposed adequately to the core values and the cultural heritage of the American society as well as the global society?

There are not easy answers to these questions. Part of the answer depends upon a person's values. In general, more conservative individuals usually advocate

a core of historical knowledge to maintain the mainstream culture and the democratic values that tie together all Americans and give us our shared heritage and national identity. This group is concerned that there is now too much emphasis upon diversity and not as much about teaching about mainstream American history. More liberal individuals, however, tend to believe that women's history and too many groups' history have been left out of the American textbooks and that children/young people from these groups do not see themselves or their groups in their history textbooks. Thus, not enough attention has been given to the various individuals and groups that make up the diverse American society and more multiple historical perspectives from people of color and women are needed. In a similar manner, the debate continues if the world history/world culture course has too much of an European-centered focus. Should non-European history/cultures be given more attention? Given the space, is it presented in a basically positive or negative manner?

The History Center Publishes New History Standards

A controversy about the teaching of history immediately arose with the publication of three books presenting history standards which were released October and November, 1994 by the National Center for History in the Schools, University of California, Los Angeles (1994).

National Standards for United States History: Exploring the American Experience (5-12)

National Standards for World History: Exploring Paths to the Present (5-12)

National Standards for History: Expanding Children's World in Time and Space (K-4)

What history to teach and how to teach it were examined carefully by the National Center for History in the Schools (History Center) which produced the National History Standards Project. The History Center proposed an integration of historical thinking (skills) and historical understanding (what students should know).

The authors of the three volumes proposed five types of historical thinking for all grade levels are as follows:

1. Chronological Thinking
2. Historical Comprehension
3. Historical Analysis and Interpretation
4. Historical Research Capabilities
5. Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision-making

Little criticism was directed to these five types of historical skills.

Content standards in history for Grades K-4 consisted of four topics with eight standards using the traditional expanding environments format.

1. Living and Working Together in Families and Communities, Now and Long Ago
2. The History of Students' Own State or Region

3. The History of the United States: Democratic Principles and Values and the People from Many Cultures Who Contributed to Its Cultural, Economic, and Political Heritage

4. The History of Peoples of Many Cultures Around the World

The book for K-4 history standards is relatively short, 77 total pages with only about 30 pages devoted to examples of student achievement. Examples focus heavily on the use of literature and trade books. This briefer K-4 coverage contrasted with the much more developed and lengthy examples of student achievement for grades 5-12 in both the American and world history publications.

The American history report divided content into ten chronological eras with four eras devoted to the twentieth century; two to four standards for each era were established with a total of 31 general content standards. Each standard stated what students should learn for the particular period; there are about 200 pages of examples of student achievment of the standards. For example, the report indicated that students are to know the causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in forging the revolutionary movement, and the reasons for the American victory (Standard I under Era 3, Revolution and the New Nation). Examples of student achievement for grades 5-6 include reconstruct chronology of the war; identify and compare leadership roles of two major leaders such as George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Samuel Adams, John Hancock, and Richard Henry Lee, and draw evidence from

novels on how the war affected the lives of people (*Jump Ship to Freedom, My Brother Sam is Dead, Johnny Tremain, and War Comes to Willy Freeman*). For grades 7-8, examples include assessing leadership of both American and British military leaders, analyze the varied responses of Native American nations to the American Revolution using the Iroquois and Cherokee as case studies, and examining the Revolutionary War from the African American perspective.

World History Standards (5-12) are divided into eight chronological eras with 39 general historical content standards. Era 1 is the Beginnings of Human Society and ends with Era 8 on The 20th Century. This is followed by about 250 pages giving examples of student achievement of the standards.

Lynne Cheney Leads Protest Over the History Standards

Even before the official publication of the national standards for American history, conservatives and other individuals protested against the report stating that it was a "politically correct" document concentrating on "multiple perspectives." Lynne V. Cheney (1994, 1995), former head of the National Endowment for the Humanities and now Fellow, American Enterprise Institute, in a *Wall Street Journal* article placed on the editorial page, October 20, 1994, criticized the document as a too gloomy picture of America, one that's too critical of all things white and too uncritical of all things, brown, black and other. As evidence, she reported the number of times historical subjects were cited in the report with the standards for United States history. According to her count, Sen.

Joseph McCarthy and/or McCarthyism is mentioned 19 times, the Ku Klux Klan 17 times, the Seneca Fall women's rights convention nine times, and Harriet Tubman six times whereas important white male heroes such as Paul Revere, Daniel Webster, Robert E. Lee, Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, Jonas Salk and the Wright brothers were not mentioned at all. She and later other critics felt that not enough attention was being given to the positive aspects of United States history in its long struggle for liberty, equality, justice and dignity and too much emphasis was placed on the country's failures leading to a warped view of American history. Cheney and others felt that the standards downplay the European origins of the United States and overemphasize the contributions of other cultures.

The History Center Responds with a Fact Sheet

Personnel from the Center for History in the Schools immediately responded with their defense of their United States History standards in a Fact Sheet, November 1, 1994. The History Center organized their defense into the following five topics in a question and answer format for answering the criticism about the United States history standards. After giving the History Center's answers, I will comment on each of these five topics in the same order of the Fact Sheet.

"Q. Is it true, as charged, that the Constitution is never mentioned in the Standards? No. Five standards are devoted to the creation, major compromises, provisions, and ratification of the Constitution."

Commentary: Critics are accurate that the word Constitution was **not** directly stated in any of the 31 content standards. However, Standard 3 under Era 3: Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820s) reads as follows: "The institutions and practices of government created during the revolution and how they were revised between 1787 and 1815 to create the foundation of the American political system" (p. 82). In addition, sub-standards under Standard 3 plus examples of student achievement do give attention to the Constitution. Albert Shanker (Cheney & Shanker, 1995), President of the American Federation of Teachers, who cited his serious concern for the world history document's enormous gaps and distortions in contemporary history, nevertheless, stated that Cheney's claim that the United States History standards did not deal with the U. S. Constitution was wildly off-base. Cheney (January, 1995) asserted again that the Constitution is not mentioned once in the 31 general U. S. History standards while the Great Depression is mentioned three times.

It is worth recognizing that the national standards for the civics and government subject areas, produced by the Center for Civic Education (1994) have much greater concern for the Constitution by the very nature of the field. One of their five major standards for all grades is "How Does the Government Established by the Constitution Embody the Purposes, Values, and Principles of American Democracy?" As would be expected, civics and government standards choice of words reflects a positive tone and central role for the Constitution. For the Center

for Civic Education, the Constitution is pivotal and a linchpin. Having only five standards is also easier on the user to remember. At the same time, the History Center's view of the Constitution is probably not as important as the Center for Civic Education.

"Q. Is it true, as charged, that the first Congress is not considered in the Standards? No. Three standards deal with the major issues addressed by that Congress and its accomplishments: its adoption of the Bill of Rights, its organization of the Supreme Court under the Judiciary Act this first Congress passed in 1789, and its adoption of Hamilton's financial program."

Commentary: The critics are accurate that the History Center did **not** directly discuss the first Congress in either the standards or student achievements but did discuss the major accomplishments of the first congress. Again, critics of the History standards probably wanted explicit attention to the achievements of Washington's administration and the first Congress as the new ship of state was launched and did not like having this period of our founding fathers indirectly covered. George Washington is never described as our first president. The History Center's lack of coverage on this topic probably does downplay the importance of Washington, Jefferson, and Hamilton. This too may have been a deliberate choice with a de-emphasis on political history focusing on great individuals. Cheney (1995), however, said that she was shocked that the gathering of the first Congress was never mentioned, but the founding of the Sierra Club and the

National Organization for Women were.

" Q. Is it true, as charged, that the Standards marginalize or omit white males? No. Of the more than 1000 references to individuals in the Standards, the vast majority are to white males...Four of those names, [*mentioned by Cheney*] however, appear in the K-4 and world standards...And the five who are not "mentioned?" All are clearly included in the standards which state, in the case of Robert E. Lee, e. g., that students should "evaluate how political, military and diplomatic leadership affected the outcome of the Civil War." Teachers and textbook writers certainly know what that standard means."

Commentary: Again, critics are citing sins of omission or lack of emphasis according to their viewpoint of what is important. Of interest is that the History Center had as its standards in historical thinking the statement "that the facts the historian reports are selected and reflect therefore the historian's judgment of what is most significant about the past" (p. 27 in the World History). Perhaps in retrospect, the History Center should have been more explicit in their documents that they were making choices of coverage out of the thousands of individuals, groups and events and that not everyone would agree with them and that there might be other alternatives or options. In terms of a course or a textbook of a standard size, this means that when content emphasizes certain individuals, issues, and developments, other topics will have to be deemphasized. To some extent writing a history or history standards is a matter of deciding what is going to be

left out.

In their rebuttal to Cheney's article, Nash and Crabtree, (1994), co-directors of the National History Standards Project, stated in their letter to the editor published in the *Wall Street Journal* that their commitment was to include all peoples as an integral, not marginal, part of history. They declared that "This is not "political correctness;" it is simply accurate history, for any history that ignores large parts of American society is incomplete and therefore distorted." Of course, the amount and the kind of attention all "men and women, named and unnamed, from all walks of life and all ethnic, racial, regions, and national backgrounds" receives is not simply accurate history, but also an area of interpretation and choice. Who and what are portrayed in a negative manner? In a positive manner? Are the standards downplaying the European origins of the United States? These are the questions raised by Cheney and others.

In addition, the charge by the History Center that textbook writers and teachers would put in certain individuals can be misleading. The standards themselves were to be a guide for teachers and textbook writers. If a name (one of 1,000) or a time period (the first Congress) does not appear, it probably reduces it chances of inclusion by both teachers and textbook writers. This argument about the standards not being textbooks is also again restated by Gary Nash, the Co-Chair of the National Council for History Standards and Ross Dunn (1995), the Coordinating Editior of the National Standards for World History volume.

The History Center in their Fact Sheet for United States History did not point out that what individuals and events are important in history is subject to change. Perhaps more focus is presently needed on computers and the information revolution than on the importance of 19th century inventors. Historians rate U. S. presidents differently as time goes by. Reinterpretation of the past is a constant part of the job of historians but this was not emphasized by the co-directors of the project in the Fact Sheet or in their editorial in the *Wall Street Journal.* They focused on the argument that they were producing an accurate history of all people.

"Q. Is it true, as charged, that the Standards "revel in" a politicized history that emphasizes what is grim in our nation's past and avoids the greatness that has flourished in our political system? No. The standards are certainly honest about the failings in our national past, and the continuing struggle to narrow the gap between our ideals and our practices."

Commentary: Again, this is an area of interpretation in which both individuals and groups will differ. Certainly compared to history textbooks written 20 years ago, the History standards are more realistic or honest (or grim) about the American experience. They may also be more realistic than most American history textbooks presently written but this is only my impression. The History standards seem to place more emphasis on the value of reform movements and Indian policy than in present day textbooks.

"Q. Is it true, as Cheney charges, that she was "promised" a particular product ("X") when co-funding these standards, but that the election of a Democratic administration in 1992 unleashed the forces of "political correctness" responsible for this document ("Y") and created a bureaucracy that will almost certainly ensure its certification and replacement of traditional history in the schools?"

The History Center denied these charges. It cited its involvement with more than 30 major professional, scholarly, and public-interest organizations and thousands of reviewers from the nation.

Commentary: The impact of these groups in three day weekends and individuals upon the document is not known. Officially, the National Council for the Social Studies is listed as one of the participating organizations and one can presume that the endorsement in light of NCSS's own standards was luke-warm. It has been charged by Cheney that the members of the American Historical Association said that they would boycott the proceedings if "Western civilization was given any emphasis."

What happened in these meetings is a matter of interest. Ross Dunn (1995), the coordinating editor for the National Standards for World History, has written a short account of the history of the world history standards. He does not comment on Cheney's charge directly but states in a May, 1994 meeting with the National Council he was surprised that a few Council members still were

suggesting that a world history embracing not just Europe, but Africa, Asia and Latin America, might just be a passing fad. He reports that the few member who would later publicly charge that the standards "marginalized" the West made little effort to argue their views before the council.

It should be noted, however, that in general academics and the professional organizations for historians and sociologists as well as the NCSS are probably more liberal than the general public Times Mirror Center for People and the Press Survey (1995) reported that the national news media are liberal compared with the public. Most of the historians, but not all, on the National Council on History Standards probably reflected the more recent revisionist scholarship or the New History in the field, chief among them varieties of ethnic studies, social history, and feminism, and not proponents of traditional history.

The National Center for History in the Schools issued another fact sheet on November 16, 1994 defending their World History standards. These criticisms focused on whether or not the World History standards reported everything about white people is evil and oppressive, the standards emphasize the negative, are overburdened with detail, and are imbalanced because they "diminish" or fail to give any emphasis to the history of Western Civilization. The History Center denied these criticisms as misrepresentations, unreasonable, and bizarre.

After the November, 1994 election it was clear that a more conservative Congress had been elected. This meant there was not a match or mesh between

the History Center's standards with multiple perspectives and conservatives' interpretation of a traditional American history. The history standards were out of step with the political climate. In effect, the cold war abroad is over but a series of culture wars at home are being fought in America today on such issues as political correctness, affirmative action, and multiculturalism. It will be worthwhile to hear the History Center's co-director has to say. Nash is expected to write a book on the history controversy which will give his interpretation of the history of the History standards.

The Controversy Quickly Grows

The battleground was set for what history would be taught in the schools. Lerner, Nagai, and Rothman (1995) in their book praised by William Bennett, Lynne Cheney, and Diane Ravitch reported that conventional wisdom among students of the curriculum is that the major threat to freedom of the schools comes from the religious right. While this may or may not be true at one time, Lerner, Nagai and Rothman assert that the major thrust today involves the imposition on schools of the ideology of particular groups that seek to use education as a mechanism for changing society. These authors document the growing influence of these groups and their supporters among educators through a content analysis of leading high history school texts and how this outlook and the willingness to impose it has became part of educators' conventional wisdom. The History standards controversy, however, seems to indicate that the vocal public, aroused by

conservatives, questioned and opposed the viewpoints of liberal educators and some historians.

The media and its commentators were quick to pick up on this controversial topic of history standards. Headlines in the leading newspapers and magazines had such titles as: "Conflict over a New History Curriculum," "The Hijacking of American History," "Instead of Western Civ, It's Multiciv," "History According to Whom: Let the Debate Continue," "History Rewrites Itself," and "History without Heroes?"

In general, the more liberal newspapers and magazines such as editorials in the *New York Times* (1995) and *Los Angeles Times* (1994) warmly supported the history standards with only a few criticisms of the documents. In a similar manner, critics from more conservative newspapers and magazines condemned the standards for being manifestations of left-wing "political correctness" and extravagant multiculturalism. Their criticism also focused heavily on the American History standards, grades 5-12, and to a lesser extent the World History standards. Comments were almost exclusively devoted to the examples given of student achievement (the bulk of the documents) and not on the general standards themselves except noting that the Constitution was not mentioned in the general standards. Hardly anyone commented on the five historical thinking standards that were to be used from K-12 except to say that they demanded more critical thinking of students than what has typically been required in most history courses.

The K-4 history standards were neglected with the exception of the criticism that the Supreme Court, Congress, and the Presidency were not mentioned while labor unrest, women's suffrage, and folk songs were given attention.

It should be noted that much of the discussion probably was contributed by individuals who had not yet read the documents but depended on reviews of the History standards, and especially Cheney's criticisms. Cheney's article in the *Wall Street Journal* set the tone for the debate and from that point on the History Center was on the defensive. There were delays of several weeks before one could secure a copy of the standards yet this did not prevent much of the discussion in the early months after the publications of the documents. Both sides saw the debate as a battle for hearts and souls of America's youth.

A few days after Cheney's article appeared, Rush Limbaugh, radio, TV host/author, in his comments to his wide radio audience said that the standards were the work of a secret group and should be "flushed down the toilet." Discussion on the History standards came to a head on January 18, 1995 on the floor of the U. S. Senate. Senator Slade Gorton (R. Washington) offered an amendment forbidding national approval of the present standards and requiring that such approval be reserved only for history standards that show "a decent respect for the contributions of Western Civilization." After hours of debate, the Senate watered down this proposal and passed a "sense of the Senate" resolution condemning the history standards as they were presently written. The vote was 99

to 1. In February, the Senate deleted the anti-standard resolution from the bill to which it had been attached. The almost unanimous vote, however, indicated serious problems for the History standards. The History Center had certainly not found allies defending their standards in the floor of the Senate.

Furthermore, under Goals 2000, the National Education Standards and Improvement Council (NESIC), the group that was suppose to approve the submission of standards, has not officially had its members appointed. With the new members of Congress being more conservative, it is expected that this agency will wither because of its image of political control and as a symbol of federal authority over the states. The new Congress has little use of a federal agency that would certify national standards. Furthermore, according to Weiner (1995), undersecretary of Education Marshall S. Smith told the reporters of the *Washington Post* that the president "had nothing to do with those folks" who drafted the standards. Winik (1995) interviewed Secretary Richard Riley (1995), the Secretary of Education, admitted that one month after the release of the standards that he had not read them adding that "it is impossible for me to make a personal observation on whether they're good, bad, or indifferent." In other words, it appears that there was little support from either the administration or Congress to support the present history standards. In the meantime, poltical candiates such as Senator Bob Dole continued to criticize the proposed national history standards for "concentrating on some of our worst moments" such as McCarthyism and the rise

of the Ku Klux Klan, without even describing George Washington as the nation's first president.

In October, 1995 the Council for Basic Education released a report of the national history standards. There were two review panels, one in U. S. History and the other in world history. The panels made the following nine recommendations for their improvement.

1. Standards--without teaching examples--should be revised and adopted.
2. The revision and all further work should be guided by the National Center for History in the School's criteria for developing history standards.
3. Delete the teaching examples.
4. Eliminate the biased language.
5. Clarify, expand, and integrate the standards for history thinking in order to discourage present-mindedness, easy moralizing, and poorly informed historical judgement.
6. Strengthen the standards in regard to the treatment of science, mathematics, technology, and medicine; economic history; the exchange and evolution of ideas; and interactions between and among the five historical spheres.
7. Treat social groups in their specific historical contexts, recognizing diversity within, as well as between, them.
8. Standards should find ways to encourage students to see the big picture based on their understanding of particular facts and to consider large issues and

their development over the span of time and place.

9. The U. S. history panel recomends that in order to achieve a more complete picture of American history, the U. S. history standards need to pay more attention to the relationship between groups and the American nation, the opportunities afforded to immigrants, and the development of democratic ideals. In addition, more attention should be given such presences as Washington and Jefferson and seminal documents such as the Bill of Rights and the Constitution.

The results of the two panels are not surprising. Diane Ravitch, who had previously stated that the idea of standards was good but these history standards were flawed, was a member of the ten persons on the U. S. History panel.

The review panels' recommendations were seen as an attempt to moderate the debate and refocus attention of the benefits of having standards. Nash was reported in an article in the Los Angeles time as stating that the center welcomes improvement recommended by the panel and will not include the teaching examples when it publishes the final draft next year. While the final word on the history standards is not yet set, their coverage in the media does raise some very complex issues.

METHODOLOGY

First, it is recognized in doing a content analysis of the media on the history standards controversy that a wide variety of viewpoints exist among both the

commentators in the media as well as educators and that only a very limited sample of the media was examined. A search was made of the coverage of the standards debate in selected national/international American newspapers and magazines such as the *New York Times,* the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Time*, and *U. S. News & World Report.* These were considered the most influential with the largest number of readers. Computer searches also were made of what educators have contributed to the national standards debate. Only limited coverage was made on the topic on the radio/television or what was said on the Internet or e-mail. However, in passing it should be mentioned that on the Internet it was scientists and engineers who stated that science and women scientists were neglected. This theme was not picked up in the newsprint, although it, in my opinion, is a very valid criticism.

Secondly, it is recognized that qualitative research as indicated in the recent handbook by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) is presently in a ferment with different models and directions. This raises the question of whether it is possible to be an "honest broker" as one reads and interprets the printed word. An additional problem is that Kleinman and Copp (1993) state that researchers have often ignored their own emotional reaction to people and issues that they study. Kleinman and Copp ask the question on how can our feelings get in the way of research? Improperly dealt with, they argue, our emotions can muddle both our research and interpretations.

To clarify my emotions and biases to this audience, I was reminded of the controversy in California (1991) over the Houghlin Mifflin social studies textbooks. Charlotte Crabtree, now emerita professor of education at U.C.L.A., and Diane Ravitch, who was then professor of history and education, Teachers College, Columbia University, were the principal writers of the *California History-Social Science Framework* (1987). Gary Nash, professor of history at U.C.L.A., was in turn one of the authors of California's new Houghlin Mifflin textbooks. Crabtree and Nash became the co-directors of the history standards project. Both were well aware of possible controversy of social studies' textbooks and presumably might have been more sensitive to possible critical reaction to new history standards and ways of offsetting or responding to it.

I had secured the progress report and draft standards (1993, 1994) of the U. S. History 5-12 standards, which appeared to be readily available from the History Center and certainly not secret classified documents at the later stages of the project. From my reading of it I predicted that the history standards would be controversial. I was in error in that I thought originally that ethnic/minority groups and women would not be completely satisfied with the standards and I had expected that the gay/lesbian groups would also find the document inadequate and too traditional. After all, the world history standards do not cite black Egypt as the source of all civilizations. Neither of these two predictions turned out to be accurate. My point of view/bias during the examination of the media was that the

history standards was twofold: (1) the interpretations of history change over the course of time; and (2) the history standards should be balanced with both a multicultural perspective as well as a core of historical knowledge to maintain the mainstream culture. I recognize that achieving the balance is a delicate matter to be arrived at by compromises. Later, my emotions were pity for the History Center's group as they became underdogs in the controversy and seeing some of their good ideas neglected, especially their five categories of historical thinking (skills), the use of literature, art, architecture, music, and other sources, and teaching methods such as debates and simulations to both understand the past and make it interesting for students.

Then I made a content analysis to identify themes was made. A theme was used as the unit of analysis, with the following three themes were selected: (1) Should we have national standards?; (2) Is revision an essential part of history?; and (3) Can standards be realistic?

1. Should We Have National Standards?

The issue of national standards has been around for the past few years and was incorporated into the Goals 2000 legislation initiated by the Bush administration. In her overview of the standards movement, Lewis (1994, 1995) has summarized the debate on goals and Jennings (1995) edited the viewpoints of key players in the progress of one of the hottest items in education reform today. The Phi Delta Kappan plus other professional education journals have given good

coverage to both the pros and cons (see especially Eisner, 1992) on this topic. Lewis discusses the difficulty of the terminology used. What are standards? Are we talking about *content standards*, what should be learned in various subject areas or *performance standards*, levels of learning that are considered satisfactory. In addition, the term *opportunity-to-learn standards*, the conditions and resources necessary to give students an equal chance to meet the performance standards, remains critical.

The first standards were written by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) after work over a ten year period with steady feedback from the profession. The math standards were released in 1989 and have been considered a model for all other groups. These math standards focused on critical thinking and problem solving with a good balance between content and skills.

In 1989 federal agencies funded subject area groups to produce national standards in their own field. Many of the projects have multiple funding from different federal agencies plus foundation support. The History Center said that they received $1.6 million from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Department of Education to develop national standards in history. One critic put the tag at $2.2 million but they may have counted previous grants to the History Center. Therefore critics could and did complain that millions of dollars of taxpayers' money were spent and "wasted" on the history project.

How did the media respond to the idea of national standards during the

history standards controversy? Almost immediately Christopher T. Cross, President of the Council for Basic Education (I994), plus others defended the idea of standards. Ravitch (1995) and Tyson (1995) both stated that they agreed with the critics of the history project but felt that the History standards could be fixed or improved. Albert Shanker (1995), an ardent supporter for years of national standards, also echoed the same arguments: the present History standards, especially the World history, were seriously flawed but the idea and process of standard setting was extremely worthwhile. In turn, the articles that appeared in popular magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek* did not comment at all on the need for standards. These articles focused on the criticisms and content of the history project. The need for standards was taken for granted. The only discussion on standards, if any, was a description of the process of setting standards in *Goals 2000* and how the standards were to be certified.

2. Is Revision an Essential Process in History?

Historians regard revision and reinterpreting history as what historical scholarship is all about. The Civil War, the cold war, the dropping of atomic bombs on Japan, the New Deal, Christopher Columbus, Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Dwight Eisenhower are just a few of the personalities and events subject to constant revision and reinterpretations that take place in American history. In addition, the New History as it is called looks at the more anonymous

people: ordinary citizens, slaves, farm families, and union members. More attention is now also given to popular culture and social history. Revision is part of the process in which history enlarges its perspectives and enriches its insights. This also means that future historians also will question the present current historical scholarship. The history that students will learn about in 20 years will not be the same as today.

A review of the media indicated that very few commentators looked at the idea of history as revision. *The Wall Street Journal* printed a letter to the editor written by John H. Coatsworth (Feb. 28, 1995) President, American Historical Association, who criticized severely the *Wall Street Journal* Jan. 31 editorial "The Trend of History" for their interpretation of history for not including the idea that historians look at competing interpretations and use new tools and new sources to check the validity of old conclusions. Coatsworth in summary gave a flunking grade to the *Wall Street Journal*'s editorial. Coatsworth's article was on the role of historians in general and not the standards per se. In addition, the *New York Times* published two articles relating to revision. The first was an article "History According to Whom: Let the Debate Continue" by Carol Gluck (November 19, 1994), a historian at Columbia and a member who served on the National Standards Council. Gluck stated that both the American society and the world have changed in the past few decades and that the standards were responsive to these changes. The second was a *New York Times'* (November 13, 1994) article

by James Atlas entitled "Ways to Look at the Past (Or Did It Really Happen?)" that gave a great deal of attention to the idea that history was revision. Albert Shanker also stated that the same set of facts can lend itself to different historical interpretations. But on the whole, much more attention was given to who was "hot" and given attention or who was left out in the history standards than the idea of history being revision.

Of interest were the few historians' views that appeared in the controversy. Gary Nash, the historian who co-directed the standards project, was heavily interviewed by the press and other media but there was a less than might have been expected from other historians in defense of the History standards project and/or in terms of the idea that history is a revision and reinterpretation. Joyce Appleby (1995), Professor of History, UCLA, in an editorial to the Los Angeles Times wrote that the seventeen past presidents of the American Historical Association and the Organization of American Historians have "written enthusiastic letters of support." These letters of support apparently were written to the National History group because it appears that they did not receive wide publicity in the press. The history organizations as organizations have as yet not come out directly to support the proposed history standards. It is not clear why this happened although there were, however, only a few historians who were publically critical of the history standards.

It did appear that historians as a profession did not rush to the defense of

the standards. To me it seems more likely that if the geography standards or the civics/government had been attacked as severely as the History standards were, geographers and their associated professional organizations as well as the law profession and judges (the civics standards had no academic discipline society or organization sponsor) would have come to the defense of their respective standards. NCSS certainly would have come to the defense of their standards. This apparent lack of support may have been related to how the history project was funded. The American Historical Association was not the funded organization. In contrast, the National Geographic Society had the dominant role in funding and overseeing the geography project in which they coordinated the efforts of the American Geographical Society, the Association of American Geographers, and the National Council for Geographic Education.

The net result was that it appeared that the history standards did not have much public support from the historians or their professional organizations. Perhaps the historians were not aware of the controversy. However, given the political climate, it is not clear how effective their support would have been.

3. Are the Standards Realistic?

It was almost an unanimous opinion from the media that the History standards were set high and certainly were not dumbed down standards. Defenders of the History standards stated that higher levels of thinking rather than

just memorization of facts were stressed in the history standards. Few disagreed with this conclusion although some critics of the standards said that it was necessary for students to first know the facts before they could engage in such activities such as debates and simulations. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who had previously written about his concern that there was too much attention being given to multiculturalism in history, said that all historians would be happy if students just achieved part of the standards. The few teachers cited in the printed page also agreed that the standards for history were high. In local newspapers, teachers tended to believe that the standards were not realistic. Among the teachers' responses were the following: not enough money to buy appropriate resources, not enough time in their busy schedules to design new curriculum, unmotivated students, and large classes. Again, it should be noted that views of teachers and their professional organizations were given little time or attention by the media in the history controversy. In effect, teachers were almost left out of the debate.

In answer to these concerns about high standards, advocates of standards have always maintained that high standards are necessary as a goal. If the standards were achieved readily by most of the students, they would need to change to be more challenging. Therefore, most would agree that one of the strengths of the History standards is the high standards they set. Like all standards issues, this still leaves the question of how at risk students or ESL

students will accomplish the higher standards. Another issue that was not mentioned in the history controversy is the unevenness of the student activities suggested for the different eras. Some activities appear in some eras to be more difficult than other eras. This may reflect the fact that different committees worked on different eras.

The editor of the *Teachers College Record* (1995) however, added another perspective on how unrealistic the debate the history standards was. The editor believed what was left out in the history standards debate with its exclusively political focus was two decades of research in developmental psychology, learning theory, and pedagogy. Thus, the knowledge that children bring to school must provide the basis for acquiring new knowledge, including skills such as the historical skills advocated by the history standards. In addition, the history debate did not foster greater awareness of the complex, multifaceted character of educational problems and the necessity for equally multifaceted reform strategies. These arguments go back to the purpose of having standards in the first place and what can be the expected reform results of having standards.

Impact of the Controversy

The impact of the controversy on the History Center's project is not clear at the present time. This is especially hard to measure since eventually it is the local school where any implementation of the standards will take place. It is also not

clear how acceptable the revisions of the documents will be.

The impact of the history controversy on other subject area projects may be to send a warning on possible difficulties in acceptance by the public. The science standards because of their policy dimensions on such issues as the environment and population may have to anticipate possible criticism. The groups writing the reading standards, presently having difficulty in arriving at consensus, may have to give more attention to content than just to process since that is what the public seems to focus upon and not skills.

As far as the other social studies standards, there appear to be winners and losers as a result of the history standards' controversy making the use of the other social studies standards more attractive to schools and their teachers. Why risk the community's wrath by using the controversial History standards? While the wide audience reading the leading newspapers and magazines does not read every single word, more people are now likely to recall something negative about the History standards. The 1995 27th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll (Elam & Rose, 1995) asked the respondents in the Awareness of National Education Issues (p. 44) to respond to the following statement: The debate over what should be taught in U. S. History coures in the public schools. About one third indicated a great deal (12%) and a fair amount (24%). One third stated not very much (33%) and not at all (30%). The one-third awareness is actually very high since in the same survey the issue of private school choice, around for many years, had only

about one-half of the respondents with knowledge of having heard or read (a great deal 22% and a fair amount (29%).

The public is now more alert to any proposed changes in the history/social studies curriculum. This also means also that publishers are not very likely at the present time to use the History standards as a guide in their publication of textbooks. It would be almost a kiss of death for a commercial publisher to give credit to using the present History standards.

Among the social studies groups producing standards, I think that civics/government standards may have the most impact in many areas. The virtues of their standards are that there are only five major standards and this makes it easier to remember than 31 or 39 History standards. In addition, the civics/government publication reads almost like a course outline. This will make it much easier for a publisher as well as a school to use. Furthermore, it is hard to find anyone who faults the need for improving the teaching of civics and government. The project also appears to have solid support from government agencies and legal personnel. The impact of the history controversy appears to be for them that all publicity about standards is good publicity since their project seems to have excellent acceptance. The history controversy alerted the public to the fact that standards were being produced in different subject areas. Building into their budget the distribution of thousands of free copies of the civics/government standards was an extremely helpful way to get their standards

into the hands of teachers. It also appears that the civics standards will be used by National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) in designing their assessment program for citizenship.

The NCSS standards and the geography standards also should benefit from the history controversy as more schools turn away from using the History standards. The NCSS standards will gain if the National Education Standards and Improvement Council (NESIC) withers away since social studies was not officially listed as one of the subject area to be certified by this committee. The strongest point about the NCSS standards is that they are broad and cut across the various subject area disciplines. There are also only ten in number and easier to work with. A disadvantage to their use is that there are very broad and will require a great deal of time to implement into the curriculum.

The geography standards also have not been criticized but they face, as I see it, two additional problems. The geography standards presently reflect the interests of professional geographers and now have more emphasis on physical geography with such topics as oceans currents and the like. They now have 18 standards versus the familiar old five on location, region, and the like. The older five standards were especially popular with some elementary teachers The newer standards may prove harder to remember and to work with. In addition, geography usually does not have a secure place as a course offering such history or civics.

With regard to individuals, careers and reputations as well as political

ambitions were also on the line. For those involved in the controversy, this was not just a debate but has impact upon their own lives. It also points out to the growing importance of the media. Years ago, NSF also ran into a controversy on its funded project, MACOS (Man, A Course of Study), which also was discussed in Congress. But its coverage was relatively small in the media compared to the history standards' controversy.

Conclusion

In summary, the more liberal newspapers in general such as the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* supported the new History standards with a few qualifications. This was also true that the more liberal magazines and journals supported the History standards. In a similar manner, the more conservative magazines such as *U. S. News and World Report* were generally very negative about the new standards. The History standards debate had a political focus where the line up of supporters and critics according to the political spectrum was not unusual. In effect, there are and were fundamental philosophical differences about our nation and world history and how textbooks should be written. There was a neglect in the media of whether or not we needed standards or the idea that history is revision. This probably means that the public supports the idea of standards and so standards may be here to stay for a number of years. An analysis of media coverage also pointed to the absence in the debate of the views

of historians and their professional associations as well as classroom teachers' viewpoints. The history controversy also will have an impact on other projects in other fields designing standards as well as acceptance of other social studies standards. Finally, the federal government will be now more reluctant to any educational support any projects that might be deemed controversial.

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